

great number of other Franks, conquer the country, and exterminate all. It was precisely the same thing that Joseph meant when he talked of *divining by his cup*.

Julius Serenus tells us, that the method of *divining by the cup* among the Abyssinians, Chaldees, and Egyptians, was to fill it first with water, then to throw into it their plates of gold and silver, together with some precious stones, whereon were engraven certain characters: and, after that, the persons who came to consult the oracle used certain forms of incantation, and so calling upon the devil, received their answer several ways; sometimes by articulate sounds, sometimes by the characters, which were in the cup, arising upon the surface of the water, and by this arrangement forming the answer; and many times by the visible appearing of the persons themselves about whom the oracle was consulted. Cornelius Agrippa tells us likewise, that the manner of some was to pour melted wax into a cup containing water, which wax would range itself into order, and so form answers, according to the questions proposed.

ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY.

CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION.

[CONTINUED.]

The first Christian church, founded by the apostles, was that of Jerusalem, which was the model of all those that were afterwards erected during this first century. This church was, however, governed by the apostles themselves, to whom both the *elders*, and those who were intrusted with the care of the poor, even the *deacons*, were subject. The people, though they had not abandoned the Jewish worship, held, however, separate assemblies, in which they were instructed by the apostles and elders, prayed together, celebrated the holy Supper in remembrance of Christ, of his death and sufferings, and the salvation offered to mankind through him; and at the conclusion of these meetings, they testified their mutual love, partly by their liberality to the poor, and partly by sober and friendly repasts, (Acts ii. 42.) which from thence were called *feasts of charity*. Among the virtues which distinguished the rising church in this its infancy, that of charity to the poor and needy shone in the first rank, and with the brightest lustre. The rich supplied the wants of their indigent brethren with such liberality and readiness, that, as St. Luke tells us, among the primitive disciples of Christ, all things were in common. (Acts ii. 44; iv. 32.) This expression has, however, been greatly abused, and has been made to signify a *community of rights, goods, or possessions*, than which interpretation nothing is more groundless, nothing more false. For, from a multitude of reasons, as well as from the express words of St. Peter, (Acts v. 4.) it is abundantly manifest that the community, which is implied in mutual use and mutual liberality, is the only thing intended in this passage.

The apostles having finished their work at Jerusalem, went from thence to employ their labours in other nations: travelled, with this view, over a great part of the known world, and in a short period planted a vast number of churches among the Gentiles. Several of these are mentioned in the sacred writings, particularly in the Acts of the Apostles; though these are, undoubtedly, but a small part of the churches which were founded, either by the apostles themselves, or by their disciples under their immediate direction. The distance of time, and the want of records, leave us at a loss with respect to many interesting circumstances of the peregrinations of the apostles; nor have we any certain or precise accounts of the limits of their voyages, of the particular countries where they sojourned, nor of the times and places in which they finished their glorious course. The stories that are told concerning their arrival and exploits among the Gauls, the English, the Spaniards, the Germans, the Americans, the Chinese, the Indians, and the Russians, are too romantic in their nature, and of too recent a date, to be received by an impartial inquirer after truth. The greatest part of these fables were forged after the time of Charlemagne, when most of the Christian churches contended about the antiquity of their origin, with as much vehemence as the Arcadians, Egyptians, and Greeks, disputed formerly about their seniority and precedence.

At the same time, the beauty and excellence of the Christian religion excited the admiration of the thinking part of mankind, wherever the apostles directed their course. Many, who were not willing to adopt the whole of its doctrines, were, nevertheless, as appears from undoubted records, so struck with the account of Christ's life and actions, and charmed with the sublime purity of his precepts, that they ranked him in the number of the greatest heroes, nay, even of the gods themselves. Great numbers kept, with the utmost care, in their houses, pictures or images of the divine Saviour and his apostles, which they treated with the highest marks of veneration and respect. And so illustrious was the fame of Christ's power grown, after his resurrection from the dead, and the miraculous gifts shed from on high upon his apostles, that the Emperor Tiberius is said to have proposed his being enrolled among the gods of Rome, which the opposition of the senate hindered from taking effect. Many have doubted of the truth of this story; there are, however, several authors of the first note who have declared, that the reasons alleged for the truth of this fact are such as have removed their doubts, and appeared to them satisfactory and conclusive.

When we consider the rapid progress of Christianity among the Gentile nations, and the poor and feeble instruments by which this great and amazing event was immediately effected, we must naturally have recourse to an omnipotent and invisible hand, as its true and proper cause. For unless we suppose here a divine interposition, how was it possible that men, destitute of all human aid, without credit or riches, learning or eloquence, could, in so short a time, persuade a considerable part of mankind to abandon the religion of their ancestors? How was it possible, that a handful of apostles, who, as fishermen and publicans, must have been contemned by their own nation, and as Jews, must have been odious to all others, could engage the learned and the mighty, as well as the simple and those of low degree, to forsake their favourite prejudices, and to embrace a new religion, which was an enemy to their corrupt passions? And, indeed, there were undoubted marks of a celestial power perpetually attending their ministry. There was, in their very language, an incredible energy, an amazing power of sending light into the understanding, and conviction into the heart. To this were added, the commanding influence of stupendous miracles, the foretelling of future events, the power of discerning the secret thoughts and intentions of the heart, a magnanimity superior to all difficulties, a contempt of riches and honours, a serene tranquillity in the face of death, and an invincible patience under torments still more dreadful than death itself; and all this accompanied with lives free from all stain, and adorned with the constant practice of sublime virtue. Thus were the messengers of the divine Saviour, the heralds of his spiritual and immortal kingdom, furnished for their glorious work, as the unanimous voice of ancient history so loudly testifies. The event sufficiently declares this; for without these remarkable and extraordinary circumstances, no rational account can be given of the rapid propagation of the gospel throughout the world.

What indeed contributed further to this glorious event, was, the power vested in the apostles of transmitting to their disciples these miraculous gifts. For many of the first Christians were no sooner baptized according to Christ's appointment, and dedicated to the service of God by solemn prayer and the imposition of hands, than they spoke the languages they had never known or learned before; foretold future events, healed the sick by pronouncing the name of Jesus, restored the dead to life, and performed many things above the reach of human power. And it is no wonder, if men, who had the power of communicating to others these marvellous gifts, appeared great and respectable, wherever they exercised their glorious ministry.

Such, then, were the true causes of that amazing rapidity with which the Christian religion spread itself upon earth; and those who pretend to assign other reasons for this surprising event, indulge themselves in idle fictions, which must disgust every attentive observer of men and things. In vain, therefore, have some imagined that the extraordinary liberality of the Christians to their poor, was a temptation to the more indolent and corrupt part of the multitude to embrace

the gospel. Such malignant and superficial reasoners do not consider, that those who embraced this divine religion exposed their lives to the most imminent danger; nor have they attention enough to recollect, that neither lazy nor vicious members were suffered to remain in the society of Christians. Equally vain is the invention of those who imagine, that the profligate lives of the heathen priests was an occasion of the conversion of many to Christianity. For, though this might indeed give them a disgust at the religion of these unworthy ministers, yet it could not, alone, attach them to that of Jesus, which offered them from the world no other prospects than those of poverty, infamy, and death. The person who could embrace the gospel, solely from the motive now mentioned, must have reasoned in this senseless and extravagant manner: "The ministers of that religion which I have professed from my infancy, lead profligate lives; therefore, I will become a Christian, join myself to that body of men who are condemned by the laws of the state, and thus expose my life and fortune to the most imminent danger."

BIOGRAPHY.

THE LIFE OF THE REV. JOHN WESLEY, A.M.

[CONTINUED.]

At the Conference of 1745 a general view of church-government was adopted. A minister of Christ was contemplated as commencing his labours at some given place. He raises a society. Then he visits other places in the neighbourhood, where also his ministry is crowned with success, and he forms more societies, over every one of which he appoints some one to watch. These are Deacons. As the work advances, they require other subordinate Deacons to assist them, in regard of whom they are Presbyters or Elders, while the first minister upon whom they all depend as their father in the Lord, and the common bond of union to them all with their respective charges, may be called the Bishop or Overseer of the whole. At a subsequent Conference it was concluded, that although this plan of government generally prevailed in the apostolic age, it was not absolutely binding, in all its details, on Christians in every period; that, if the great principles which it involves are duly secured, various modifications of the form, according to time and circumstances, are allowable. And one of those principles which Mr. Wesley held to be, if not absolutely essential, yet strictly scriptural and highly beneficial, (as the unbroken tenor of his subsequent life fully proved,) was the principle of a united ministry, and of a connexion between the several societies founded on the union of their ministry, and on their subjection, in all matters of general bearing, to one common discipline. Having satisfied himself on the subject of church government, and regarding himself as a scriptural bishop, Mr. Wesley proceeded to call forth preachers, and set them apart or ordain them to the sacred office, for the purpose of establishing and extending that great work which he had the honour of commencing. Still he did not go beyond the necessity. He could make this scriptural appointment of ministers and ordinances without renouncing communion with the established Church, and therefore he did not renounce it, nor did the church itself see fit to interfere so as to exclude him. In these views, Charles Wesley too, who was at every one of the early conferences, concurred with him; and if he thought somewhat differently on these points afterwards, it was not John, but Charles, who departed from first principles.

In the month of August, 1747, Mr. Wesley visited Ireland for the first time; and found in Dublin a considerable society, which had been formed by Mr. Williams, one of the preachers. Mr. Wesley, after remaining a short time, requested his brother to succeed him, who found that a persecution had commenced against the infant society, and that a Popish mob had committed gross outrages. Some of the rioters were sent to prison, but the Grand Jury, at the following assizes, ignored the bill, and thus gave up the Methodists to the fury of a licentious mob. Mr. Charles Wesley continued in Ireland a considerable time, and societies were formed in different parts of the country.